

COLORADO CANYONS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA
Advisory Council Meeting Minutes
August 7, 2003

Attendees:

John Foster	Russ Walker	Mel Lloyd
Warren Gore	Gene Arnesen	Jane Ross
Joe Keys	B. Boeschenstein	

Greetings and Introductions

Chairman Warren Gore called the meeting to order at 3:15 p.m. and invited Gene Arnesen, CCNCA outdoor recreation planner, to provide an update on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) activities.

BLM Update

Gene reported that current CCNCA projects include improving a group-use area in Rabbit Valley, where gravel was applied to a portion of the parking area. Containment posts were also installed to prevent encroachment and discourage damage to outlying areas.

Special funding was received to use for Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) improvements on a section of The Trail Through Time in Rabbit Valley.

Sera Janson, CCNCA recreation technician, has done a great job in updating kiosk posters that display colorful maps and user information at key entry points throughout the CCNCA. Russ Walker suggested posting these on the CCNCA web site.

Nora Hamilton is a seasonal employee hired this summer to conduct a CCNCA sign inventory. Each sign is digitally located using a global positioning system (GPS) unit, with sign type and condition noted in a database developed specifically for this project. Staff can then evaluate whether signs need to be improved or removed. New Bureau and state standards are dictating sign changes, making the project a necessary but valuable one.

Weed control projects are ongoing for Russian knapweed, purple loosestrife, and tamarisk. A tamarisk control trip is scheduled for September in the River Corridor, and chosen locations are usually popular camping areas.

Gene emphasized that many projects must wait for the Resource Management Plan (RMP) to be completed.

Funding requests are due next month for fiscal year 2005 projects. The CCNCA staff must compete with other Bureau offices nationwide for the funds, so a project's status is uncertain until the funding is actually received. CCNCA staff will request funding for finishing the improvements begun on the Rabbit Valley event parking area.

Gene and Phil Gezon, BLM outdoor recreation planner for the BLM Grand Junction field office (FO), are traveling to the BLM Moab FO to meet with staff on how the process of issuing permits might be improved upon between the two BLM jurisdictions.

Gene noted that implementing and then monitoring actions set forth in the RMP will be critical to the success of the Plan. Adding an ecologist to the CCNCA staff would be advantageous in monitoring for resource impacts and the interrelated visitors experiences and benefits.

Many BLM employees are approaching retirement, and impacts on both FO and CCNCA staffing needs are being evaluated in preparation for this.

Two field positions need to be filled for next season as well; Sera will be leaving the BLM and Chris Pipkin's seasonal recreation technician position was never filled when he took a full-time position with the FO last year.

Gene informed the Advisory Council that, during the public comment period for the RMP, it would be important and time well spent for them to address Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) triggers.

Fiscal year 2004 budget information has recently been received, and several Budget Proposal System (BPS) project requests have been funded. Base funding will remain the same as last year's (\$335,000), which does not cover current staffing needs. However, additional funding (\$210,000) was made available as a part of base funding for initiating specific CCNCA projects. One-time funding for specific projects (education/interpretation, improving trailheads mostly in the Wilderness) has also been awarded.

Warren asked whether a September meeting would be necessary, and discussion turned to an Advisory Council river field trip instead. September schedules for the members present conflicted, but Jane agreed to check with the other Advisory Council members not present, as well as Troy Schnurr, CCNCA recreation ranger, who would be taking them on the river. Warren suggested that the float trip be used to discuss any pending issues, replacing the regularly scheduled September 4 meeting. Early October was also suggested as a potential time for the trip.

Jane Ross, CCNCA planning team leader, talked about the draft RMP's status, which is nearing completion. CCNCA staff will brief the BLM State Office on Tuesday, August 19, with the Washington Office briefing scheduled for August 21 via teleconference. The document is currently undergoing internal review. The printer should receive the document around September 1, with distribution to the public 4 to 6 weeks later. Local libraries and the project web site will also have the RMP available for review.

Federal Register notices have been sent to the SO for review and, once approved, sent on to Washington for publishing. Jane informed the group that open houses are planned for November and early December during the public comment period, which will end some time in January 2004 (depending upon distribution date). After an official protest period of 30 days and any necessary resolutions, the final RMP should be issued in June 2004.

Russ questioned the process of choosing the preferred alternative prior to the development of the impact analysis. Jane explained that the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA) requirements influenced the timing, as did the Bureau's time-sensitive, accelerated schedule for getting the RMP out to the public. Had there been more time, Jane agreed that developing the analysis before pinpointing the preferred alternative could be beneficial.

Jane reported that the Grand Junction Chamber of Commerce and Mesa County are planning a "Grand Junction Economic Summit" on October 30. The Sonoran Institute, which presented a workshop during the CCNCA planning process and provided key information for the socioeconomic section of the RMP, has been invited to join the Summit. The event will be held at the Two Rivers Convention Center.

Jane also asked the Advisory Council to think about a schedule for 2004 meetings and what would work best. Warren suggested that a bi-monthly schedule might work well as the planning process winds down.

Public Comment

Bennett Boeschstein, Fruita community development director, announced that Snooks Bottom is going to be purchased with grant monies obtained by the city of Fruita, and the closing is scheduled for August 25. The property includes a 20-acre lake, and the upper 50 acres will connect to the Horsethief Canyon State Wildlife Refuge and allow motorized access, while the lower acreage will offer hiking trails and solitude. Bennett added that a future partnership, with the Colorado Division of Wildlife and the BLM, remains critical in managing the area. Bennett added that the area is named after the Snooks family, who farmed the area. The Elam family, the seller, will be allowed to take gravel off the property through 2010.

Bennett also reported that the central Public Lands Information Center is about to be realized, with a number of interested agencies and organizations participating in the effort. The National Park Service and the Dinosaur Diamond Scenic Byway organization have committed to funding the entire project, but other important partners will include the BLM, state of Colorado, and city of Fruita.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 p.m.

AGENDA

Colorado Canyons National Conservation Area Advisory Council Meeting

August 7, 2003

- Greetings, Introductions and BLM Update
- Discuss possible River Trip
- Update on RMP Schedule
 - Briefing to State Office
 - Briefing to Washington Office
 - Printing
 - Federal Register Notices
 - Released to public
- Advisory Council Topics
- Public Comment Period